

Remarks

The Office Action dated June 24, 2004 has been received and duly noted. Claims 28 and 46 have been amended to overcome the objection and the §112 rejection, respectively, noted by the Examiner.

Independent Claim 24 has been amended to include the feature previously set forth in independent method Claim 53, and now recites an outwardly facing, annularly extending, thread-free pin shoulder on the first ring. As amended, Applicant submits Claim 24 is distinguishable from the prior art, which does not teach the combination recited in amended Claim 24. Newly added Claim 58 depends upon amended Claim 24.

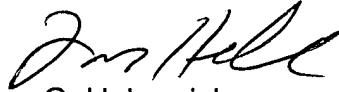
Independent method Claim 28 has been amended to include the feature previously set forth in Claim 53, which the Examiner indicated would be allowable if written in independent form. Claim 53 has been canceled. Accordingly, amended Claim 28 and the claims dependent thereon should be allowable.

Independent Claim 46 has been amended to include the recitations previously set forth in dependent Claim 48, which the Examiner indicated would be allowable if written in independent form. Claim 46 now recites that the externally threaded portion provides at least a portion of a first one of male threads on said first ring. Accordingly, amended Claim 46 and the claims dependent thereon should be in condition for allowance.

Appl. No.: 09/894,457
Amendment Dated: September 17, 2004
Reply to Office Action of June 21, 2004

Early allowance of the application is requested.

Respectfully submitted,



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Reg. No. 29,389

Date: September 17, 2004

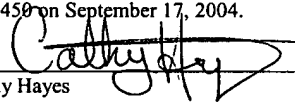
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By: _____

Cathy Hayes



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